

Narrator's decision-making in the love song of j. alfred prufrock

[Literature](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," the narrator seems to be an older man who spends a lot of time making decisions but perhaps also second guessing himself. He is unconfident and uncomfortable in his surroundings, because he is always questioning, "how should I presume?" or "do I dare?" (Eliot 2040-2041). The narrator spends his whole life pondering about the decisions he never makes, and he gets nowhere. He is constantly worried about what other people think of him, but he also says something that shows just what he thinks of himself:

For I have known them all already, known them all—

Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;

I know the voices dying with a dying fall

Beneath the music from a farther room.

So how should I presume? (Eliot 2040-2041).

The narrator leads into this stanza from the previous stanza with, "In a minute there is time / For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse" (Eliot 2040). Here, the narrator is saying when he makes a decision, he'll always have the time to take it back and keep revising it. The narrator thinks that "there will be time, there will be time," and thus he thinks he can keep changing his decisions "hundred[s]" of times (Eliot 2040). The narrator is afraid of the possible consequences of his actions, and thus he thinks it's better to not act at all. He goes on to say how he is all too familiar

with contemplating his decisions, spending days on them, and getting nowhere. When he says that his life is measured out by “ coffee spoons”, the narrator is saying what he thinks about his life, amounting to just small coffee spoons. Coffee is not a very interesting aspect of life; it's just a daily, habitual part of everyday life. Saying that his life is measured out by something like this is implying that the narrator thinks his life is worthless. Having spent “ evenings, mornings, afternoons” in solitude to only have coffee wake him up shows how the narrator is perhaps also very lonely and sad. He, however, knows what he wants (a woman), but he is too afraid to go after her. When Eliot writes about the “ dying fall” he is alluding to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (2041). In the play, Orsino listened to music that had a “ dying fall,” reignited his love for another character. When the narrator says that this dying fall is coming from “ voices” in a “ farther room,” he may be saying that love is far from him, or that he witnesses the love of other people, but never his own (Eliot 2041). The narrator then questions how he should proceed, which was really the question that's been on his mind the entire time. Everything else he describes is a reflection on his life and surroundings, but his life is not over yet and he still has a chance with the love of his life. However, he is never able to make a move because he is constantly debating with himself about what move to make. His ideas change by the minute, and his thoughts are caught in a stalemate of inaction. The narrator is spending his whole life trying to figure out how he will go about getting this woman, but he cannot decide and thus he never even begins.